

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A
July 23, 2023
The Rev. Mary S. Trainor
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Texts referenced: Genesis 28:10-19, Psalm 139, Romans 8:12-25, Matthew 13:24-43

Our Gospels have been about sowing seeds lately; this is close to home for me. My vegetable garden has grown so well this year: I have already harvested lettuce, cucumbers, and tomatoes – the squash are looking promising! Last year's garden was unproductive, costing way more than it produced. Maybe the key this year was the humongous brick of peat moss I added to the soil. I don't know. But I do know that perhaps in that peat moss were some weedy grass seeds. When I pick salad greens for dinner, I unintentionally pick grass leaves right along with the lettuce leaves – weedy grass and lettuce are growing together. Oh, I have been weeding the grass out all along – but I never get them all. When we sit down to eat the mixed salad I prepared, what do I see but some grass right in my salad bowl? Ugh! A weed is defined as “an unwanted plant.” Weeding is pretty complicated, for to know the difference between crop and weed leaves is difficult. In today's Gospel, the “parable of the wheat and the weeds,” there is a nasty weed called “bearded darnel,” that looks similar to wheat – and it is poisonous! This plant has been referred to in literary works (by Shakespeare and others) as a symbol of subversion within human communities. The Journal of Ethnobiology says, “Where there is darnel, there is treachery and toxicity.” Oh yes, there is a lesson here for us.

Jesus said in the Gospel, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field,” but someone else came along and sowed weeds. The kingdom of heaven is God's realm, and it includes all of us. Weeds and wheat were growing together in the field in the parable, and in the field called the church weeds and wheat grow together too. We are a mixture, not neatly classified like weeds and wheat. We are created in God's image; we are wheat, but there is a little weediness in each of us. God's grace is available to all of us for transformation.

My five-year-old grandson, Jackson, is an energetic smart little guy who likes order and rules. I often take him to the toy store, Winkies, on Silver Spring and when we go I walk down the stairs on the left of the railing and he walks down the right. He is quick to correct me that I am to walk down on the right and up on the left. And Jackson likes things to be sorted out properly: he sorts his truck from his cars, his big Legos from his small ones, and his peas from his carrots. Jackson is not alone. Many of us like to take control, we like to do sorting- even sorting of people in our midst.

In today's Gospel, the farmhands ask, “do you want us to go and gather the weeds?” They were ready to get rid of those weeds. But surprise, Jesus said “Let both of them grow together until the harvest... Let anyone with ears listen.” We are to be together here in God's kingdom: a real community of people caring for and accepting each other, not weeding each other out, not judging. The church is a mixed body: a haven for saints and a hospital for sinners, a place for

those who are transformed and those who are not yet transforming. Jesus teaches that we are not to distinguish the good from the bad, deciding who belongs and who does not belong: we all belong! In our Epistle today, we heard five times that we are the children of God, heirs. It does not say that some of us are children of God, and others are not; we are ALL God's children and heirs of the kingdom. Jesus' love has no bounds. In the end, God takes care of the weeding and sorting and judging, and we need to trust in God. Theologian Tom Long says, "this parable applies to the ministry of Jesus himself, to the life of the church, and to the future judgment at the end of the world" God's role and our role are not the same. God's role is as redeemer, sanctifier, and judge. Our role is to accept God's love and sow seeds of love—embrace being God's beloved children, helping others to do so too.

Sara Miles, a lonely San Francisco journalist disillusioned by Christianity, found herself at a brewery a while back looking across the street at St. Gregory's Episcopal Church. She said, because of her history, the last place she would look for life's answers was in a church! But there she was, and the church door was open. On a whim, she went into this place where she definitely didn't belong. Hiding in a back pew, she watched them pray aloud, stand up, sit down, and kneel. She had no idea what to do. Some would have classified her as a weed. In fact, a different community might have escorted her out. St. George's was in the middle of a midweek Holy Communion service; and at one point everyone was asked to come forward to receive, including her. Sara went forward following others, and a piece of bread was put into her hands with the words "the Body of Christ, the bread of heaven." She had never before had communion. She wrote later, in her book *Take this Bread*, that at that moment, "something outrageous...happened. Jesus happened to me; Jesus was real, and in my mouth, utterly short-circuiting my ability to do anything but cry." Sara kept coming back to this church, unable to explain but knowing that her life had changed forever for the better. Sara is now a well-known author, as well as the director of the food pantry at that church. She said in an interview, "Church is actually a place for people to experience WE, fighting against the individual model of everything and submitting to being part of a body, a body with people you haven't chosen, and focusing your life together on making a difference. Left to my own devices I'm gonna choose people like me. And that is not how Christianity works. Christianity puts you together with all humanity. It's a religion of relationship. And you don't get to pick what the edges of that are." Sara wasn't sorted out, she belonged. Jesus said, "Let both of them grow together until the harvest."

Today's message is one of comfort, hope, and community. We live in a world of polarity and division, but HERE we are assured that in the end God will take care of it, and there will be redemption. In the last two lines of today's Epistle, Paul says the word "hope" five times. He assures us, "creation itself will be set free...and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God...For in hope we are saved...we wait for it with patience." Accept God's unconditional love and hope, trust it, and share it freely with others (without a tendency to weed). We are the Body of Christ, each of us are beloved. Let us pray this prayer from the BCP p. 824 (#28): O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.